

# Former West Station Gas Works Site

## March 2024

### Produced by Washington Gas

*Under the direction of the District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), and in accordance with DC rules and regulations, Washington Gas is conducting an environmental investigation at the above referenced site.*

#### **Background**

Prior to the widespread availability of natural gas, gas was “manufactured” through a process of heating coal (and other fuels) in specialized ovens. These gas manufacturing facilities, called Manufactured Gas Plants (MGP), were common in many urban areas of the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Manufactured gas was used for residential and street lighting and cooking. The manufactured gas process produced byproducts, such as coal tar and other chemicals that were used in the chemical, dye, and pharmaceutical industries. Some byproducts may remain underground in the areas of historic MGP operations, consistent with practices of the time.

Washington Gas once owned and operated an MGP known as the “West Station Gas Works” in Washington, D.C. As the first federally-chartered gas company in the U.S., Washington Gas was responsible for providing light to the Capitol and the White House, among other things. To meet gas production requirements, Washington Gas manufactured gas from coal at the site using existing technologies, in accordance with practices and requirements of that era.

As technologies advanced, and with the development of environmental law in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, both industry and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began to identify and investigate the potential presence of historical byproducts and take remedial steps if needed to protect human health or the environment.

#### **Where is the Site?**

The former plant was built in 1858 and was located near what is now the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue NW and Virginia Avenue NW, in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. A majority of the Site was located within the area generally bounded by Virginia Avenue NW to the northeast, New Hampshire Avenue NW to the southeast, F Street NW to the south, and the Potomac River to the west.

### **When did the former plant operate?**

The former West Station MGP operated from 1858 through 1946, when it was decommissioned. In accordance with the practice of the day, the former plant's aboveground structures were demolished to ground surface between the late 1940s and late 1950s, with soil placed in gas holder foundations. Efforts were made at the time to remove the plant's piping, tanks, and other structures. However, some remnants and associated byproducts from MGP operations may remain buried below ground as was common with MGP decommissioning at the time.

### **What has been done to date?**

In 1998, Washington Gas performed an indoor air quality assessment in each of the six buildings in the Watergate complex, they include: 2700 Virginia Avenue NW, 2600 Virginia Avenue NW, 2650 Virginia Avenue NW, 2500-2560 Virginia Avenue NW, 600 New Hampshire Avenue NW, and 700 New Hampshire Avenue NW. This testing did not identify MGP-related chemicals in the air above detection limits that were achievable at the time.

In addition, Washington Gas installed a depressurization system in the Watergate East boiler room of 2500-2560 Virginia Avenue NW in 1978 to relieve hydrostatic pressure. Groundwater from the depressurization system is filtered prior to discharge into the sanitary sewer system under a permit. This system has been in operation for more than 30 years. Vicinity Energy assumed operation of the system in 2018.

### **What is the focus of current activities?**

In accordance with a directive from DOEE, Washington Gas has submitted for regulatory review a draft Site Investigation Work Plan to allow us to take a comprehensive approach to this complex project. The Work Plan includes investigation details for soil, groundwater, surface water, sediment, and indoor air quality. Washington Gas has engaged GEI Consulting, Inc. (GEI), a company with extensive MGP related experience to complete the work plan and undertake the subsequent investigation under DOEE oversight.

As part of its efforts to test indoor air quality, Washington Gas is currently working to secure the necessary access to develop building-specific work plans and evaluate air quality within the buildings located within the footprint of the former Site's operations. The buildings include those at the Watergate complex<sup>1</sup>, as well as the Potomac Plaza Apartments (2475 Virginia Avenue NW), Potomac Plaza Terraces (730 24<sup>th</sup> Street NW), and Western Presbyterian Church (2401 Virginia Avenue NW). Other buildings may be included later if warranted based on information acquired in the initial investigation.



### **What are the risks?**

While MGP constituents can pose a risk if swallowed, this is not a high likelihood in the District. Groundwater, where MGP constituents potentially associated with this Site could be found, is not used for drinking purposes, nor is there typically ingestion of buried soil. In addition, the majority of the Site is covered by a mix of buildings, asphalt, some vegetation, and concrete. Collectively these features reduce the potential for direct contact.

Additionally, as mentioned above, MGP-related chemicals were not identified in the indoor air above detection limits during indoor air quality assessments performed in 1998 at each of the six buildings in the Watergate complex. The currently proposed indoor air testing will provide additional, updated indoor air quality information in comparison with currently applicable indoor air risk levels.

### **What are the materials of concern?**

Compounds considered to be of potential concern that will be a focus of Washington Gas' investigation include polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (or PAHs) and benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene(s) (or BTEX).

### **Who can I contact for more information?**

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact us at:  
(202) 964-5140.

**A Washington Gas Community Liaison will respond to your call.**